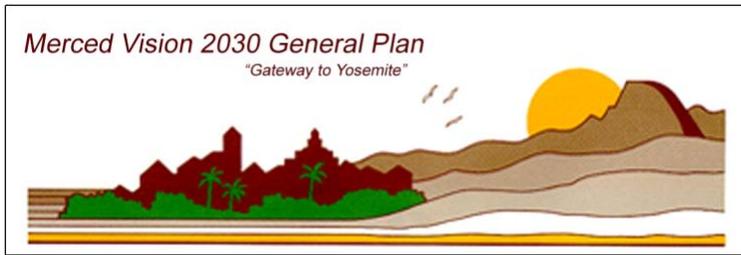


Executive Summary

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Chapter I

General Plan Summary

I.I MERCED VISION 2030 GENERAL PLAN

It has been projected that over ten million people will be added to California's population by the year 2030. A significant portion of this population growth is expected to find its way into the San Joaquin Valley. Merced, like many other Valley communities, must be prepared to respond to the challenges and changes that population growth pressures will bring to this area.

Currently, Merced residents enjoy Merced's compact size, its small-town feeling, surrounding agricultural and open space land, the parks and historic structures, the beautiful tree-lined streets, the creekside bikeways, etc. These are the result of much effort on the part of concerned citizens and appointed and elected officials.

These people looked at what the City was and decided what they wanted it to become. This is "planning" --and what the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* is all about. It builds on the efforts and visions of the past and states the aspirations for the future. The challenge, laid down by those who have preceded us, is to guide our City's growth into the new millennium in such a manner that our children and our children's children

may enjoy the same high quality of life that we enjoy today.

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* envisions a growing community that preserves much of its small town flavor and social setting, a city that has an improved economy, adequate public services and cultural facilities, and a good overall quality of life for its residents. In 2030, people will have various transportation options. Parks and open spaces will link residential, commercial, and employment centers in such a manner as to provide an attractive pedestrian and bicycle alternative to driving. Convenient public transit systems will serve these areas as well.

The future of Merced includes expansion of the 10th University of California (UC) campus and connection to an improved rail system. The UC campus will continue to provide a major educational resource to the City and its residents, and the improved rail and highway systems will link Merced with all of the major metropolitan areas of the state. The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* anticipates these developments and contains policies and strategies for maximizing the benefits that they will bring to our community.

I.II WHAT IS THE GENERAL PLAN?

California State law requires all cities and counties to have an adopted general plan. This general plan serves as the blueprint for the community's future growth and development. The general plan must address certain issues which are directly related to and influence land use decisions.

General plans must address seven issue areas, known as "elements," which need to be consistent with each other. The seven required elements are land use, circulation, open space, conservation, housing, noise, and safety. The plan must analyze issues of importance to the community, set forth policies for conservation and development, and outline specific programs or actions for implementing these policies.

I.III GENERAL PLAN DIAGRAMS

The Land Use Diagram is an integral part of the General Plan. The Diagram graphically expresses the Plan's development policies by showing the desired arrangement and general location of land uses. The Diagram is required to be consistent with the General Plan text under California law. To be useful to City officials, staff, and the public, the Land Use Diagram must allow anyone who uses the Plan to reach the same conclusion about the designated use of any property covered by the Plan.

Figure 3.1 is the City's Land Use Diagram, which can be found in the map pocket at the back of the General Plan document. It presents the general distribution of the uses of land within the City of Merced and its

Specific Urban Development Plan/Sphere of Influence (SUDP/SOI) or growth boundary.

The Land Use Diagram and text together specify the number of people and dwelling units per net acre of land for each property planned for residences and the building intensity for commercial and industrial development. Other pertinent features of the Land Use Diagram include the locations of existing and proposed parks, public schools, and other public facilities.

General plans also must contain a Circulation Element. This Element shows the location and extent of existing and proposed thoroughfares and transportation routes and facilities and correlates them with the Land Use Element. Merced's Circulation Plan (**Figure 4.1** of the General Plan) shows current and proposed arterials, collector streets, and local streets as well as bikeways and rail lines. This roadway system has been tested against the planned level of development proposed in this plan and has been found to be adequate.



I.IV ASSUMPTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* relies on several assumptions regarding existing and anticipated future conditions within Merced’s growth area, otherwise known as the Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP)/Sphere of Influence (SOI). (See **Figure 2.3** in the Urban Expansion Chapter). Specifically, these assumptions are:

- 1) Future population growth in Merced will approach 115,000 by the year 2020 and 155,000 by the year 2030.
- 2) In order to accommodate efficient levels of service delivery, regional urban development (residential, commercial, and industrial) will be focused within the Merced City’s growth area (SUDP/SOI) and not in the unincorporated areas surrounding the City.
- 3) The average household size in the SUDP/SOI will remain at approximately three people per dwelling unit.
- 4) To accommodate the future growth of the City’s SUDP/SOI, the plan will need to accommodate at least 50,000 housing units (from 28,000 in 2010).
- 5) To accommodate future growth, sufficient land area will need to be set aside to support at least 35,000 employment opportunities within the City’s growth area (from 22,000 in 2010).
- 6) Projected growth estimates will occur within the planning time-frames (20 years).

If some of these events do not occur within the next 20 years, the General Plan goals and

policies will need to be reevaluated in light of changing conditions.

I.V GOALS, POLICIES, AND IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

The heart of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* is the goals, policies, and implementing actions. In following these directives, the City will chart the course of growth and development and determine the nature of the environment and future character of Merced. *Goal, Policy, and Implementing Action* are used in the Plan as defined below:

- **Goal** = A general, overall, and ultimate purpose, aim, or end toward which the City will direct effort.
- **Policy** = A specific statement of principle or guiding action which implies clear commitment. A general direction that the City will follow in order to meet its goals by undertaking specific action programs. It is assumed that each policy statement is preceded by the phrase, “The City shall...”
- **Implementing Action** = An action, activity, or strategy carried out in response to adopted Policy to achieve a specific Goal.

I.VI GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The goals and policies of the *Merced 2030 General Plan* were developed from the following list of guiding principles.. (A complete summary of the General Plan’s goals and policies can be found in Chapter II of this Executive Summary.):

- Expansion of the Sphere of Influence and City boundary with phasing of

development to avoid premature conversion of agricultural land and to plan for cost-effective extension of municipal services.

- Foster compact and efficient development patterns.
- Connectivity between existing and planned urban areas. Examples include the northeast area toward UCM, the University Community, and South Merced.
- Merced as the single municipal service provider in the expanded sphere of influence.
- New development provides or pays its fair share of public services and facilities to avoid burdening existing city residents (in short, new growth pays for itself).
- Mixed-use, transit and pedestrian friendly urban villages in growth areas with direct access to commercial cores from surrounding neighborhoods.
- Commercial nodes in new growth areas to avoid the aesthetic and circulation issues associated with more common “strip commercial”.
- Circulation: Recognition of the cost and importance of the arterial street system and protect capacity with access standards. Designs that encourage all modes of transportation.
- Build community quality. High community standards for Merced’s services, infrastructure, and private development as a strategy for attracting business and industry and to benefit the City’s residents.
- Planning well in advance for industrial/business park uses and for the infrastructure needed to support such development.

- A diversity of housing types and opportunities.
- Encouraging Sustainable and “Green” Development.
- Planning for the provision of infrastructure ahead of development.
- Maintaining Merced’s high quality of life and keeping it a nice place to live.
- Encouraging new research parks and the use of new technologies.
- Protection of the Merced Regional Airport as an important community asset.
- Maintaining a quality educational environment for pre-school, K-12, and higher education.
- Maintaining our quality parks and recreation systems, including the bike path system.
- Encouraging a healthy community through improved medical facilities, air quality, parks & recreation opportunities, etc.

I.VII CHAPTER BY CHAPTER SUMMARY

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* is organized into eleven chapters, which are summarized in the following section.

Chapter 1--Introduction:

California State law requires all cities and counties to have an adopted general plan. This general plan serves as the blueprint for the community’s future growth and development. The general plan must address certain issues which are directly related to and influence land use decisions.

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* is organized into fourteen chapters which cover the major issue areas affecting the City's future growth. The heart of each of these chapters is the goals, policies, and implementing actions (see Sections I.V and I.VI).

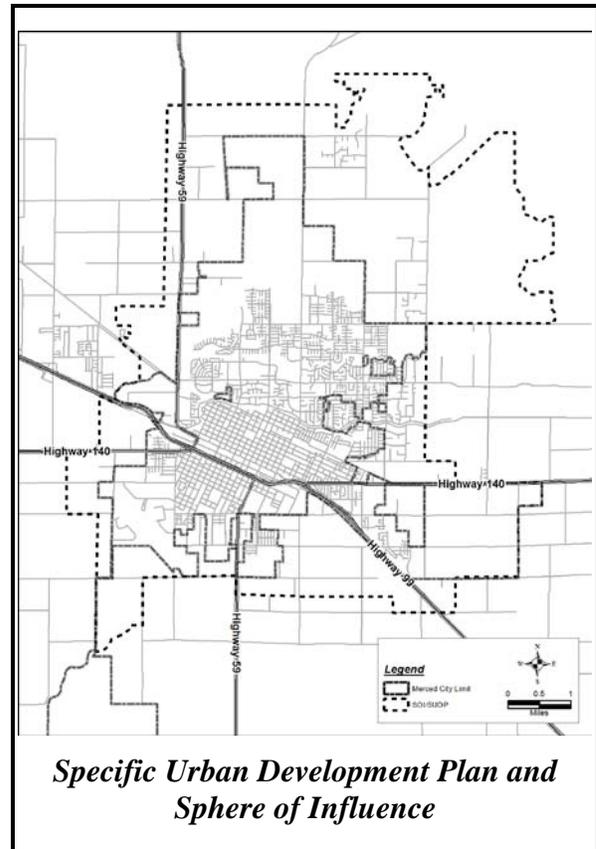
Other highlights of the Introduction include:

- a description of the preparation process of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*;
- a brief history of the growth and development of the City of Merced from 1870 to the present;
- a table that shows where each of the State-mandated requirements may be found in the Plan;
- descriptions of local and regional planning agencies; and,
- information about administering and amending the General Plan over time.

Chapter 2--Urban Expansion:

Since 1959, the City has had an adopted general plan with major updates occurring in 1968, 1981, and 1997. The most current update was strongly influenced by a series of long-range planning studies which began in 1990 with the 40-year growth study or *Merced 2030: How Should We Grow?* The process continued with the *North Merced Conceptual Land Use Plan* and the *Commercial and Industrial Land Study (1994-2010)*.

The overall approach of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* is to develop a strategy to accommodate future population growth in the most efficient manner possible.



Growth in the City of Merced is influenced by the planning policies of Merced County. The extent of future City growth is defined by the urban growth area boundary [or Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP)/Sphere of Influence (SOI)]. .

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* proposes an expansion of the City's SUDP/SOI by approximately 7,900 acres to accommodate the City's projected growth over the next 20 years. However, this newly combined SUDP/SOI is slightly smaller than the 1997 Sphere of Influence.

Urban Expansion Goals in the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* are aimed toward maintaining a compact urban form, preserving significant agricultural areas, and promoting annexation to achieve efficient public service delivery.

Other highlights of the Urban Expansion Chapter include:

- a description of the constraints that influenced the City’s growth boundaries (also known as the Specific Urban Development Plan or SUDP) and Sphere of Influence (SOI);
- a discussion of annexations and growth along the City’s fringe; and,
- population projections for the Merced area from 1995 to 2035.

Chapter 3--Land Use:

The Land Use Chapter of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* establishes land use goals and policies, supported by implementing actions, for the manner in which new development will occur and existing uses and resources will be preserved in the City of Merced. The future land use configuration of the City will be shaped through the implementation of this chapter.

Goals, policies and actions of the Land Use Chapter are intended to support and reinforce the current quality of life in the City. The key element of Land Use policy is the General Plan Land Use Diagram (*Figure 3.1*--included in a pocket at the back of the General Plan document), which depicts the location of the permitted type and density/intensity of all land uses within Merced’s SUDP/SOI. The land use policies contained in this Plan establish order and focus for the City’s land use pattern and provide the framework for future land use planning and decision making in the City of Merced.

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* Land Use Chapter covers four major issue areas:

1) Residential Neighborhoods:

The “neighborhood” is the focus of Merced’s residential environment. Much effort has been made to preserve and enhance the City’s residential neighborhoods through policies which seek to protect neighborhoods from incompatible developments and blighting influences.

Policies relating to the promotion of a wide variety of housing types and convenient access to jobs and commercial services, along with the implementation of Merced’s “Urban Village” concept will guide the development of Merced’s future neighborhoods.



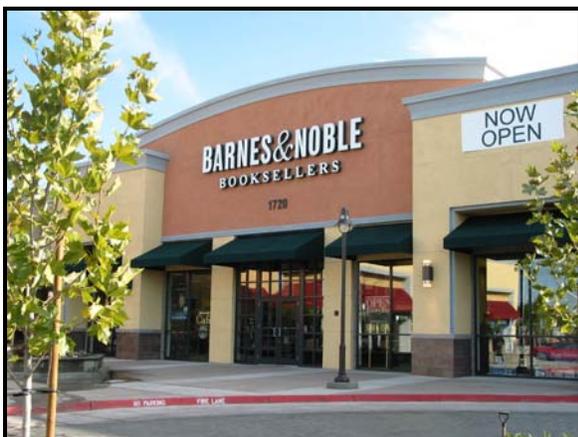
2) Economic Environment:

The City of Merced will likely continue to be the commercial, financial, and governmental center for Merced County during the coming years. Merced will also likely continue to face high unemployment rates compared to statewide averages. In order to combat this, the City must take an active role in economic and job development.

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* has taken a long-range view by designating many more sites for future industrial use than are projected to be needed during the 20-year planning period. This was done because of the need for large sites for certain kinds of industries, the lead time needed to provide sites with good access and critical infrastructure, the need to overcome impediments to development on some existing industrial sites, to provide market choice, and to reduce unemployment.

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* encourages the development of commercial areas which conveniently serve the residential population, provide employment opportunities, form an attractive segment of the community, and contribute to the community's tax base. Five different categories of commercial land use are defined within the Plan.

The Plan also promotes the continued vitality of the downtown and economic development efforts such as the Enterprise Zone. The Land Use Diagram shows employment areas with high concentrations of commercial and industrial development.



3) Urban Growth and Design:

Mixed-use and transit- and pedestrian-friendly design concepts are to be applied in the City's new growth areas and in existing areas where feasible. It should be noted that pedestrian- and transit-friendly design does not mean that the automobile is excluded. It simply means that more consideration is given to more effectively accommodating pedestrians, bicycles, and transit as well as the private automobile. Efficient circulation of automobiles will continue to be emphasized but not to the exclusion of other forms of transportation.



4) Community Plans:

The City makes use of Community Plans to master plan large areas. The City has six adopted Plans and five proposed Community Plans.

Other highlights of the Land Use Chapter include:

- land use definitions of planned land uses in Merced in residential, commercial, industrial, reserve, open space, and other categories; allowable densities and intensities; and, interrelationships among uses; and,
- a table comparing the distribution of planned land uses in the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* with the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan*.

Chapter 4--Transportation and Circulation:

The Transportation and Circulation Chapter addresses the City’s major road system, local street patterns, air facilities, bus and rail transit, and bicycle and pedestrianways. The goal is to identify the most effective ways to plan for circulation while enhancing the community and protecting the environment.

The goals and policies presented here are intended to coordinate circulation with land use by concentrating higher residential densities and major trip destinations in the vicinity of major roadways and public transit corridors.



The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan Circulation Plan* features:

- a comprehensive system of arterial streets in a one mile grid system;
- a Campus Parkway alignment along the eastern side of the SUDP/SOI and a Merced-Atwater Expressway on the western side of the SUDP/SOI to integrate existing Highway 59, Bellevue Road, and Mission Avenue alignments into a beltway or “ring-road” concept to carry cross-town traffic around established portions of the community
- a major transit corridor (M Street) designated along the central core of the

entire City and another along Bellevue Road; and,

- an expanded on-street and off-street bike path system along the City’s creeks linking together open space areas, employment centers, and residential neighborhoods.

Ultimate buildout of the City’s SUDP/SOI will require significant public improvements to the circulation system in order to maintain an acceptable level-of-service, including new highway interchanges and upgrades to existing interchanges, about 60 miles of new or improved major streets, some separated-grade railroad crossings, and numerous new bridges and traffic signals. How to finance this needed infrastructure is one of the critical issues facing the community as it grows.

Goals and policies in this chapter promote major streets, which are designed to maximize efficiency, and local streets designed to provide access for neighborhood destinations, minimize unnecessary travel demands on major streets, and minimize impacts on the environment. “Complete streets” where all modes of transportation (bicycles, transit, walking) are promoted through the provision of adequate facilities and the design of new developments that minimize barriers to their use. Passenger rail and air service are also an important aspect of the City’s circulation system.



Other highlights of the Transportation and Circulation Chapter include:

- descriptions of the current and planned transportation systems, including regional and local streets and highways, transit services, bicycle facilities, rail and air service, and pedestrian facilities;
- characteristics, design standards, and cross-sections for the different categories of streets (arterials, collectors, etc.); and,
- a table summarizing the current and projected levels-of-service for roadways throughout the City.

Chapter 5--Public Services and Facilities:

The goals and policies contained in this chapter address the provision of public services and facilities necessary to meet the demands of Merced’s residents now and in the future. The General Plan postulates what facilities may be needed or desired in the future. This includes looking for the most cost-effective and efficient ways of providing services as well as searching for alternative means of financing capital improvements.



A wide variety of public services and facilities are addressed in this chapter, including:

- Fire and Police Protection;
- Water
- Wastewater
- Storm Drainage/Flood Control
- Solid Waste Disposal
- Schools
- Library and Cultural Services
- Health and Justice Services

The location of fire facilities is a critical factor in providing adequate fire protection to the citizens of Merced. The time and distance that must be traveled to the scene of an emergency can determine whether fire suppression efforts will be successful. The goals, policies, and actions in this chapter address location criteria and distribution goals for new fire facilities.



Community-based policing aims to bring police officers into the neighborhoods they serve to increase citizen involvement and to try to deter criminal activity before it starts. This chapter includes policies designed to implement these concepts.

The City has evaluated the its water needs through 2030 and developed suggested strategies for meeting those needs. In cooperation with the County and Merced Irrigation District, the City will develop conservation and recharge efforts to stabilize the region’s aquifer.

The provision of adequate wastewater facilities to serve the City's new growth areas will require master planning for new collection facilities and the continued expansion of the City's treatment plant. These issues as well as the promotion of uses for reclaimed water are addressed in the policies in this chapter.

The master planning of facilities for managing and disposing of storm water run-off has begun. Working with the County and MID, the City supports a regional approach to addressing this issue. The policies in this chapter address the above efforts as well as designing multi-use (storm drainage, groundwater recharge, flood control, and recreation/open space) facilities.



State law mandates that the amount of solid waste deposited in landfills be reduced significantly in the coming years. The City is committed to working with the County to promote source reduction, material recovery, and recycling programs while at the same time reducing impacts from disposal facilities on City residents.

As the City grows, new school facilities will need to be provided. Although the responsibility for providing these facilities resides with the school districts, it is in the City's interest to make sure that schools are

adequately sized, centrally located to the populations they serve, and adequately served by infrastructure. The goals and policies in this chapter address desired school location criteria, the collection of school impact fees, and the cooperative planning of higher educational facilities.

Library and cultural facilities are essential to maintaining Merced's high quality of life. The City supports these services by planning for new facilities, exploring long-term financing options, encouraging joint use of facilities, and promoting public access to information technology and telecommunications infrastructure.



Government and health-related facilities also provide essential public services which will need to be expanded as the City grows. The policies in this chapter encourage the central location of major government facilities in the downtown area and convenient access to health-related facilities for all of Merced's citizens.

Other highlights of the Public Services and Facilities Chapter include:

- descriptions of current and future services and facilities provided by the City and others, such as fire and police protection, water, wastewater disposal, storm drainage/flood control, solid waste, schools, and cultural facilities;

- goals and policies regarding the maintenance and improvement of Merced’s infrastructure, the cost-effective provision of public services, and requiring new development to provide or pay for its fair share of public improvements; and,
- a discussion of proposed strategies for financing public facilities.

Chapter 6--Urban Design:

Urban design concepts tend to fall into two distinct categories relating to:

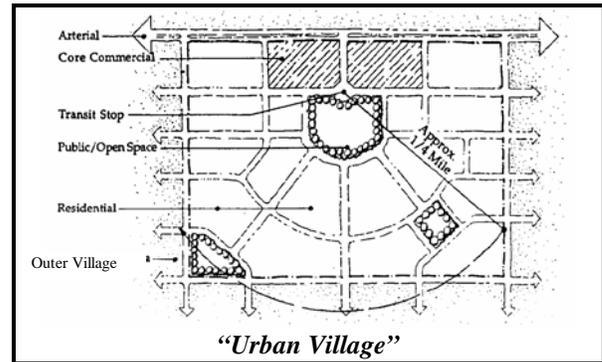
- 1) The location of different land uses throughout the city and their relationship to one another; and,
- 2) The visual character and appearance of individual buildings, sites, and districts.

Within the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, the urban design focus for new growth areas is primarily defined by the *Urban Village* concept (mixed use, pedestrian- and transit-friendly neighborhoods). These villages are made up of core commercial centers and medium-density residential areas within walking distance of the center, surrounded by lower-density housing.

The *Urban Village* and other land use and design concepts have been implemented in the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* through the following guiding principles:

- Conserve natural resource areas that give form and character to the community.
- Promote an urban form that integrates housing, shops, work places, schools, parks and civic facilities.
- Reinforce the elements of the community which give Merced its unique identity.

- Expand the City’s non-vehicular transportation network.
- Promote convenient pedestrian and vehicular access to transit, commercial, recreation, and residential places.



- Reinforce the Downtown as a focus point in the City. Conserve the special qualities of existing neighborhoods and districts.
- Focus residential, commercial, and employment center development to encourage public transit use.
- Maximize the use of City streets as public spaces.
- Assure that development takes place in a balanced manner in order to promote the economic vitality of evolving areas.

Other highlights of the Urban Design Chapter include:

- a detailed description of the City’s “Urban Village” growth model, including definitions of inner villages, outer villages, Core Commercial areas, and Village Core Residential areas;
- policies regarding the appearance of buildings and districts throughout the City; and,
- suggested urban design guidelines for architects and designers.

Chapter 7--Open Space, Conservation and Recreation:

Open space is one of the essential elements contributing to the high quality of life in the City of Merced. It provides a multitude of functions that are beneficial to the community. Open space provides parks and recreation areas, preserves natural resources, provides an avoidance mechanism for development near hazardous areas, and provides buffers between non-compatible uses.

The Merced SUDP/SOI area includes a significant amount of “open space,” including areas preserved for permanent open space, parks, water basins, beltway corridors, agriculture, etc. Additional area will be preserved for open space for recreation, wildlife or wetlands habitat conservation, or agricultural use, through the development review process.



The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* recognizes that the urban form of the City of Merced will be shaped through the retention of open space and agricultural lands. The Land Use Plan proposes the preservation of open space by concentrating urban development and directing future development to the extent feasible onto lands with lesser overall agricultural value.

The General Plan takes advantage of the open space opportunities afforded by utility rights-of-way, using them as bike and

pedestrian trails, landscaped environmental corridors, or parks. Canals and streams are also used as multi-purpose trail routes. Landscape and scenic corridors within the street system (including street trees) provide open space relief and add to the open space character of the Merced community.

The Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation chapter contains policies for open space lands and for conservation of natural and man-made resources within the City’s SUDP/SOI, including water, wildlife, soil, and historic/cultural resources. It also contains policies for the development of recreation resources in the community and the use of open space lands for recreation purposes, including expansion of the City’s urban forest and creek side bicycle/trail system.

Other highlights of the Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation Chapter include:

- descriptions of the various types of open space and parks in the Merced area;
- issues for future study (future park sites, groundwater recharge facilities, etc.); and,
- an action plan for implementing the City’s open space goals.





Chapter 8--Sustainable Development:

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* seeks to build an environmentally and economically “sustainable” city. A “sustainable city” is a city designed, constructed, and operated to efficiently use land and other natural resources, minimize waste, and manage and conserve resources for the use of present and future generations.

A “sustainable” community is one where:

- 1) housing, schools, shopping areas, and other things which meet most of the daily needs of residents are located within convenient distance of one another;
- 2) higher population densities are located around transit stops to provide the critical mass of people and activities needed to make transit economically viable;

- 3) housing provides places to live for a variety of people within a single neighborhood; and,
- 4) mixed-use and transit-friendly commercial and employment centers are promoted.

Such a community makes efficient use of land and promotes all modes of transportation, thus helping to preserve both our air quality and quality of life.

This chapter addresses important environmental and resource issues, such as air quality, climate change, energy conservation, historic preservation, healthy communities as well as soil, water, and wildlife resources.

Conversion of “prime” agricultural soils to non-agricultural uses can result in an irreversible loss in the agricultural production capacity of the region. Policies contained in the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* focus on the issue of agricultural soil loss and attempt to balance the urban growth needs of the region with the need to minimize urban encroachment onto “prime” agricultural soils.



Long-term growth and development in Merced depends on adequate clean water resources. Sustained development can be accommodated through the implementation

of policies that address the need to preserve and protect water quality while planning for the future water needs of the City and surrounding agricultural lands.

Man's settlement of the San Joaquin Valley has had a profound impact on the wildlife resources of this region over the past 100 years. Today it is recognized that the health of our natural plant and animal communities is a barometer for the overall health of our environment. It is also recognized that modern, healthy human communities can coexist beside healthy wildlife communities with the sound application of open space policy and technology. The General Plan contains policies and actions which are directed to the preservation, protection, and enhancement of the important wildlife habitat resources found in the Merced urban area.



Poor air quality has become a negative symbol of modern urban development. Our quality of life is often measured by the quality of the air in our urban places. Poor air quality is related to a number of factors. Air quality policies in this Plan address this complex environmental issue by promoting

integrated land use and circulation patterns, and cooperation with regional organizations that seek to restore the region's clean air.

Climate change and strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions are also discussed. The City has begun the preparation of a Climate Action Plan to further address these issues.

Energy use is closely related to issues relating to air quality. The burning of fossil fuels as an energy source has been one of the most significant contributors to our deteriorating air quality. Long term growth is highly dependent upon how we use energy today and how we plan future energy use. This chapter contains specific goals and policies which address issues of energy conservation and encourage the use of sustainable energy resources.



Main Street--circa 1920

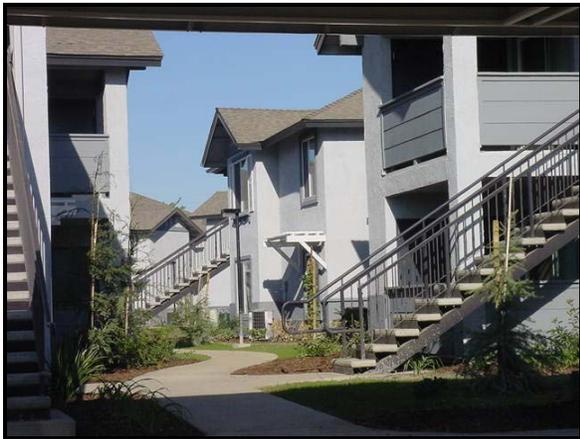
Historic and cultural resources are important elements in the appearance and man-made environment of Merced. The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* contains numerous references to the linkages between the past, present, and future. This chapter contains specific goals and actions intended to guide future City historic preservation efforts.

Other highlights of the Sustainable Development Chapter include:

- a discussion of our water resources and water quality data;
- data regarding energy use in California and noteworthy energy facts;
- a description of Merced’s important historical buildings and neighborhoods and the context in which they were built;
- an inventory of Merced Area soil resources, including soil types, characteristics, and associations; and,
- an inventory of the City’s biological and wildlife resources, including sensitive species and potential wetlands.

Chapter 9—Housing:

Please note that the Housing Element was adopted separately on November 21, 2011, in accordance with the schedule in State Law (generally every 5 to 8 years) and was NOT part of the comprehensive General Plan Update. However, the adopted Housing Element has been incorporated into this final General Plan document.



Chapter 10--Noise:

The main purpose of the Noise Chapter is to identify noisy areas and to provide measures for protecting residents from the harmful effects of excessive noise. The Noise Chapter is based on an analysis of current and projected noise levels for streets and highways, railroads, and airports. Existing noise-sensitive land uses such as hospitals, rest homes, schools, and long-term medical care facilities are identified, and a set of City policies are established to deal with excessive noise.



The Noise Chapter provides a systematic approach to: 1) the measurement and modeling of noise; 2) the establishment of noise standards; 3) the control of major noise sources; 4) community planning for the regulation of noise; and, 5) the achievement of land use compatibility through the adoption of specific policies with respect to noise.

Existing noise levels for all major sources of noise in the City of Merced have been identified. These noise levels are used as a guide for establishing land use patterns in the Land Use Chapter that minimize the exposure of community residents to excessive noise. The Noise Chapter also includes policies and implementation measures that address protecting sensitive land uses from excessive noise, minimizing impacts of noise on the general population, and reducing noise levels.

Other highlights of the Noise Chapter include:

- strategies and noise abatement techniques for dealing with noise problems;
- truck routes and noise compatibility guidelines;
- technical data used to calculate current and projected noise contours for major noise sources.

Chapter 11--Safety:

The main purpose of the Safety Chapter is to provide policies and implementing actions aimed at reducing injuries, death, property damage, and the economic and social dislocation resulting from natural hazards. The Safety Chapter proposes ways of protecting the community from any unreasonable risk associated with such hazards and seeks to minimize the risk as much as practical. It is recognized, however, that hazards are an unavoidable aspect of society and that, therefore, some degree of risk is inherent in everyday life.

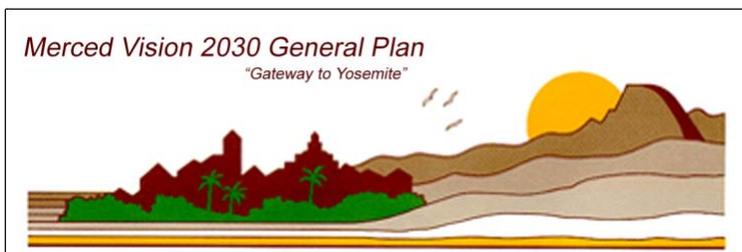
The Safety Chapter provides a systematic approach for responding to hazards relevant to the City of Merced through a set of goals, policies, and actions designed to deal with those hazards. Seismically induced ground shaking, ground failure, dam failure/seiche, flooding, urban and wildland fires, crime, air crashes, and hazardous materials are considered the relevant hazards to the City of Merced.

These policies and actions, among other things: a) encourage the seismic improvement of public facilities and infrastructure; b) endeavor to remove most of the City from the 200-year floodplain by following certain building standards; c) restrict certain land uses surrounding the Merced Regional Airport; d) support community-based police services; and, e) promote hazardous materials clean-up efforts.

Other highlights of the Safety Chapter include:

- a discussion of the City's disaster and emergency response systems, including evacuation routes; and,
- maps of areas subject to flooding and dam failure inundation.





Chapter II

Goals and Policies Summary

Chapter 2 -- Urban Expansion

Goal Area UE-1: Urban Expansion

GOALS

- A Compact Urban Form
- Preservation of Agriculturally Significant Areas
- Efficient Urban Expansion

POLICIES

- UE-1.1 Designate areas for new urban development that recognize the physical characteristics and environmental constraints of the planning area.
- UE-1.2 Foster compact and efficient development patterns to maintain a compact urban form.
- UE-1.3 Control the annexation, timing, density, and location of new land uses within the City's urban expansion boundaries.
- UE-1.4 Continue joint planning efforts on the UC Merced and University Community plans.
- UE-1.5 Promote annexation of developed areas within the City's Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP)/Sphere of Influence (SOI) during the planning period.
- UE-1.6 Consider expansion of the City's SUDP/SOI boundary for areas within the Area of Interest when certain conditions are met.

Chapter 3 -- Land Use

Goal Area L-1: Residential & Neighborhood Development

GOALS

- Housing Opportunities in Balance with Jobs Created in the Merced Urban Area
- A Wide Range of Residential Densities and Housing Types in the City
- Preservation and Enhancement of Existing Neighborhoods
- Quality Residential Environments

- **Mixed-use, Transit and Pedestrian-Friendly Residential Environments**
- **Ensure Adequate Housing is Available to All Segments of the Population**

POLICIES

- L-1.1** Promote balanced development which provides jobs, services and housing.
- L-1.2** Encourage a diversity of building types, ownership, prices, designs, and site plans for residential areas throughout the City.
- L-1.3** Encourage a diversity of lot sizes in residential subdivisions.
- L-1.4** Conserve residential areas that are threatened by blighting influences.
- L-1.5** Protect existing neighborhoods from incompatible developments.
- L-1.6** Continue to pursue quality single-family and higher density residential development.
- L-1.7** Encourage the location of multi-family developments on sites with good access to transportation, shopping, employment centers, and services.
- L-1.8** Create livable and identifiable residential neighborhoods.
- L-1.9** Ensure connectivity between existing and planned urban areas.

Goal Area L-2: Economic & Business Development

GOALS

- **Increased Employment Opportunities for the Citizens of Merced**
- **A Diverse and Balanced Merced Economy**
- **Preservation and Expansion of the City's Economic Base [Quintero]**
- **High Quality Industrial Areas, Including Technology Parks**
- **More High-Quality Research & Development Parks**
- **Ready Access to Commercial Centers and Services Throughout the City**
- **A Distinguished Downtown**

POLICIES

- L-2.1** Encourage further development of appropriate commercial and industrial uses throughout the City.
- L-2.2** Locate new or expanded industrial, research & development, technology, and business parks in appropriate areas.
- L-2.3** Promote the retention and expansion of existing industrial and commercial businesses.
- L-2.4** Provide a range of services adjacent to and within industrial areas to reduce auto trips.
- L-2.5** Maintain attractive industrial areas and business parks.
- L-2.6** Provide neighborhood commercial centers in proportion to residential development in the City.

- L-2.7** Locate and design new commercial development to provide good access from adjacent neighborhoods and reduce congestion on major streets.
- L-2.8** Encourage a mixture of uses and activities and reinvestment that will maintain the vitality of the downtown area.
- L-2.9** Identify locations and develop standards for campus-type research and development parks.
- L-2.10** Encourage well-planned freeway-oriented developments

Goal Area L-3: Urban Growth and Design

GOALS

- **Living Environments which Encourage People to Use a Variety of Transportation Alternatives**
- **A Compact Urban Village Design for New Growth Areas**
- **Self-sustaining, Mixed-Use, Pedestrian-Friendly Neighborhoods**
- **Transit-Oriented Development Adjacent to the High Speed Rail Station**

POLICIES

- L-3.1** Create land use patterns that will encourage people to walk, bicycle, or use public transit for an increased number of their daily trips.
- L-3.2** Encourage infill development and a compact urban form.
- L-3.3** Promote site designs that encourage walking, cycling, and transit use.
- L-3.4** Build identity, character, and enhanced community design in the South Merced Community Plan area.
- L-3.5** Develop a Transit-Oriented Development Overlay Zone Adjacent to the Planned High Speed Rail Station in Downtown Merced
- L-3.6** Require community plans for large new development areas within the City's SUDP prior to development.
- L-3.7** Implement policies and principles to conform to the intent of the San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint.

Chapter 4.0 -- Transportation and Circulation

Goal Area T-1: Streets and Roads

GOALS

- **An Integrated Road System that is Safe and Efficient for Motorized and Non-motorized Uses**
- **A Circulation System that is Accessible, Convenient and Flexible**
- **A Circulation System that Minimizes Adverse Impacts upon the Community**

■ A Comprehensive System of “Complete Streets” Which Address All Modes of Transportation

POLICIES

- T-1.1** Design streets consistent with circulation function, affected land uses, and all modes of transportation.
- T-1.2** Coordinate circulation and transportation planning with pertinent regional, State and Federal agencies.
- T-1.3** Design major roads to maximize efficiency and accessibility.
- T-1.4** Promote traffic safety for all modes of transportation.
- T-1.5** Minimize unnecessary travel demand on major streets and promote energy conservation.
- T-1.6** Minimize adverse impacts on the environment from existing and proposed road systems.
- T-1.7** Minimize street system impacts on residential neighborhoods and other sensitive land uses.
- T-1.8** Use a minimum peak hour Level of Service (LOS) “D” as a design objective for all new streets in new growth areas and for most existing City streets except under special circumstances.

Goal Area T-2: Bicycles, Pedestrians, and Public Transit

GOALS

- An Efficient and Comprehensive Public Transit System**
- A Comprehensive System of Safe and Convenient Bicycle Routes (Within the Community and Throughout the Urban Area)**
- A Comprehensive System of Safe and Convenient Pedestrianways**
- A Comprehensive System of “Complete Streets” Addressing All Modes of Transportation**

POLICIES

- T-2.1** Provide for and maintain a major transitway along "M" Street and possibly along the Bellevue Road/Merced-Atwater Expressway and Campus Parkway corridors.
- T-2.2** Support and enhance the use of public transit.
- T-2.3** Support a safe and effective public transit system.
- T-2.4** Encourage the use of bicycles.
- T-2.5** Provide convenient bicycle support facilities to encourage bicycle use.
- T-2.6** Maintain and expand the community’s existing bicycle circulation system.
- T-2.7** Maintain a pedestrian-friendly environment.
- T-2.8** Improve planning for pedestrians.
- T-2.9** Ensure that new development provides the facilities and programs that improve the effectiveness of Transportation Control Measures and Congestion Management Programs.

Goal Area T-3: Air and Rail Services

GOALS

- **Air and Rail Systems that Provide Safe and Convenient Service to the Community**

POLICIES

AIR

- T-3.1** Preserve the Merced Regional Airport and its protective zones from incompatible encroachment and incompatible development within the Airport Industrial Park.
- T-3.2** Promote and encourage the orderly and timely development of commercial and general aviation facilities.
- T-3.3** Provide adequate ground transportation systems that complement air transportation facilities.

RAIL

- T-3.4** Reduce rail system impacts on circulation within the urban area.
- T-3.5** Support enhanced railroad passenger service and high speed rail service for Merced.
- T-3.6** Retain and expand as needed rail facilities serving industrial development.

Chapter 5 -- Public Services & Facilities

Goal Area P-1: Public Facilities and Services

GOALS

- **Maintenance and Improvement of Merced's Existing Infrastructure**
- **New Development Which Includes a Full Complement of Infrastructure and Municipal Public Facilities**
- **Efficient and Cost-Effective Public Service Delivery**

POLICIES

- P-1.1** Provide adequate public infrastructure and municipal services to meet the needs of future development.
- P-1.2** Utilize existing infrastructure and public service capacities to the maximum extent possible and provide for the logical, timely and economically efficient extension of municipal infrastructure and services where necessary.
- P-1.3** Require new development to provide or pay for its fair share of public facility and infrastructure improvements.

Goal Area P-2: Police and Fire Protection Services

GOAL

- **Maximum Crime and Fire Protection Services**

POLICY

P-2.1 Maintain and enhance public protection facilities, equipment, and personnel to the maximum extent feasible within the resource constraints of the City to serve the City's needs.

Goal Area P-3: Water

GOAL

- **An Adequate Water Source, Distribution and Treatment Infrastructure System in Merced**

POLICIES

P-3.1 Ensure that adequate water supply can be provided within the City's service area, concurrent with service expansion and population growth.

P-3.2. In cooperation with the County and the Merced Irrigation District, work to stabilize the region's aquifer.

Goal Area P-4: Wastewater

GOAL

- **An Adequate Wastewater Collection, Treatment and Disposal System in Merced**

POLICIES

P-4.1 Provide adequate wastewater collection, treatment and disposal capacity for existing and projected future needs.

P-4.2 Consider the use of reclaimed water to reduce non-potable water demands whenever practical.

Goal Area P-5: Storm Drainage and Flood Control

GOAL

- **An Adequate Storm Drainage Collection and Disposal System in Merced.**

POLICIES

P-5.1 Provide effective storm drainage facilities for future development.

P-5.2 Integrate drainage facilities with bike paths, sidewalks, recreation facilities, agricultural activities, groundwater recharge, and landscaping.

Goal Area P-6: Solid Waste

GOAL

- **Solid Waste Management Services That Accommodate the Local Population Without Causing Significant Damage to Environmental Resources**

POLICIES

- P-6.1** Establish programs to recover recyclable materials and energy from solid wastes generated within the City.
- P-6.2** Minimize the potential impacts of waste collection, transportation and disposal facilities upon the residents of Merced.

Goal Area P-7: Schools

GOAL

- **Adequate School Facilities for All Students in the Merced Urban Area**
- **Excellent Cooperative Relationships between the City, the School Districts, and the Development Community**

POLICIES

- P-7.1** Cooperate with Merced area school districts to provide elementary, intermediate and high school sites that are centrally located to the populations they serve and adequate to serve community growth.
- P-7.2** Support higher educational opportunities.

Goal Area P-8: Cultural and Community Services

GOAL

- **Support for Cultural and Community Services that Improve and Maintain the Quality of Life for the Residents of Merced**

POLICIES

- P-8.1** The City will support the cultural and health related needs of the community by incorporating such facilities and services in development and redevelopment proposals.
- P-8.2** The City will promote consolidation of complementary or support services to avoid duplication of programs.
- P-8.3** Work with others to study innovative ways of delivering library services at the neighborhood level to promote community education and provide a focus for community activity and cultural development.

Goal Area P-9: Telecommunications

GOAL

- **Development of Infrastructure and Service to Allow All Merced Residents to Utilize New Technologies to Communicate with the Region, the Nation, and the World**

POLICIES

- P-9.1** Develop City standards for telecommunications infrastructure and encourage its installation in all new development.
- P-9.2** Make information regarding City government and decision-making, local services, and opportunities to participate in City governance available to Merced citizens in electronic form.
- P-9.3** Make use of telecommunications services to increase public safety.

Chapter 6 -- Urban Design

Goal Area UD-1: Transit Ready Development or Urban Villages

GOALS

- **An Integrated Urban Form**
- **Transit-Ready Community Design**
- **Pedestrian- and Bicycle-Compatible Neighborhoods**

POLICIES

- UD-1.1** Apply Transit-Ready Development or Urban Village design principles to new development in the City's new growth areas.
- UD-1.2** Distribute and design Urban Villages to promote convenient vehicular, pedestrian, and transit access.
- UD-1.3** Promote and facilitate Core Commercial design principles in Village commercial areas.
- UD-1.4** Promote and facilitate Urban Village residential area design principles.
- UD-1.5** Design and develop public and quasi-public buildings and uses utilizing Transit-Ready Development or Urban Village principles.

Goal Area UD-2: Overall Community Appearance

GOALS

- **A Unique Community Image**
- **Attractive Neighborhoods and Districts**
- **Attractive and Memorable Public Streets**

POLICIES

- UD-2.1** Use Urban Village design concepts in neighborhood revitalization programs.
- UD-2.2** Maintain and enhance the unique community appearance of Merced.

Chapter 7-- Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation

Goal Area OS-1: Open Space for the Preservation of Natural Resources

GOALS

- Maintenance of Merced’s Biological Resources
- A High-Quality, Expanding Urban Forest
- Preservation of Scenic Corridors and Resources
- Improvement and Enhancement of Water Quality

POLICIES

- OS-1.1 Identify and mitigate impacts to wildlife habitats which support rare, endangered, or threatened species.
- OS-1.2 Preserve and enhance creeks in their natural state throughout the planning area.
- OS-1.3 Promote the protection and enhancement of designated scenic routes.
- OS-1.4 Improve and expand the City’s urban forest.
- OS-1.5 Preserve and enhance water quality.

Goal Area OS-2: Open Space for the Managed Production of Resources

GOAL

- Protection of Regional Agricultural Resources

POLICIES

- OS-2.1 Protect agricultural areas outside the City’s SUDP from urban impacts.
- OS-2.2 Relieve pressures on converting areas containing large concentrations of “prime” agricultural soils to urban uses by providing adequate urban development land within the Merced City SUDP.

Goal Area OS-3: Open Space for Outdoor Recreation

GOALS

- High-Quality Recreational Open Space
- Adequate Public Recreation Facilities
- Comprehensive Urban Trail and Bike Path System

POLICIES

- OS-3.1 Provide high-quality park and open space facilities to serve the needs of a growing population.
- OS-3.2 Maintain and expand the City's Bikeway and Trail System.
- OS-3.3 Maintain the City's existing high-quality open space facilities.
- OS-3.4 Develop a diverse and integrated system of park facilities throughout Merced.

Goal Area OS-4: Open Space for Public Health and Safety

GOAL

- **A Safe Environment For Merced's Citizens**

POLICY

OS-4.1 Preserve open space areas which are necessary to maintaining public health and safety.

Goal Area OS-5: Conservation of Resources

GOALS

- **Conservation of Water Resources**
- **Preservation and Protection of Soil Resources**

POLICIES

OS-5.1 Promote water conservation throughout the planning area.

OS-5.2 Protect soil resources from the erosive forces of wind and water.

Chapter 8 -- Sustainable Development

Goal Area SD-1: Air Quality and Climate Change

GOALS

- **Clean Air with Minimal Toxic Substances and Odor**
- **Clean Air with Minimal Particulate Content**
- **Effective and Efficient Transportation Infrastructure**
- **Coordinated and Cooperative Inter-Governmental Air Quality Programs**
- **Reduction in the Generation of Greenhouse Gases (GHG) from New Development**

POLICIES:

SD-1.1 Accurately determine and fairly mitigate the local and regional air quality impacts of projects proposed in the City of Merced.

SD-1.2 Coordinate local air quality programs with regional programs and those of neighboring jurisdictions.

SD-1.3 Integrate land use planning, transportation planning, and air quality planning for the most efficient use of public resources and for a healthier environment.

SD-1.4 Educate the public on the impact of individual transportation, lifestyle, and land use decisions on air quality.

SD-1.5 Provide public facilities and operations which can serve as a model for the private sector in implementation of air quality programs.

SD-1.6 Reduce emissions of PM10 and other particulates with local control potential.

SD-1.7 Develop and implement a Climate Action Plan for the City.

SD-1.8 Implement Policies in Other General Plan Chapters to Address Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Goals

Goal Area SD-2: Cultural Resources

GOALS:

- A Diverse And Rich Historic and Cultural Resource Environment
- A Long-Term Community Historic Preservation/Improvement Program

POLICIES:

- SD-2.1** Identify and preserve the City's archaeological resources.
- SD-2.2** Identify and preserve the City's historic and cultural resources.
- SD-2.3** Develop and promote financial incentive programs for historic preservation efforts.

Goal Area SD-3: Energy Resources

GOAL

- Sustainable Energy Resource Use in the City of Merced

POLICIES

- SD-3.1** Promote the use of Solar Energy technology and other Alternative Energy Resources.
- SD-3.2** Encourage the use of energy conservation features, low-emission equipment, and alternative energy sources for all new residential and commercial development.

Goal Area SD-4: Healthy Communities

GOALS

- Healthy Lives for Community Residents
- A Healthy Environment for All Residents

POLICIES

- SD-4.1** Create a healthy built environment.
- SD-4.2** Encourage increased physical activity of residents and healthier food choices.

Chapter 9 -- Housing

Goal Area H-1: New Affordable Housing Construction

GOALS

- Increase the Stock of Affordable Housing for Extremely Low, Very Low, Low, and Moderate Income Households
- Encourage a Mix of Housing Throughout the City to Meet the Needs of Different Income Groups
- Encourage the Construction of Housing and Facilities to Meet Special Needs, Including Farmworkers, Homeless, Large Families, Seniors, and People with Physical or Mental Disabilities

POLICIES:

- H-1.1** Support Increased Densities In Residential Areas.
- H-1.2** Support Development of Affordable Housing.
- H-1.3** Pursue Joint Development Agreements.
- H-1.4** Provide Priority Review and Permitting for Affordable Housing Projects.
- H-1.5** Support the Construction of Second Units.
- H-1.6** Pursue State and Federal Funds for New Housing Construction.
- H-1.7** Support Housing to Meet Special Needs.
- H-1.8** Ensure Land Availability.

Goal Area H-2: Housing Conservation and Rehabilitation

GOALS

- **Ensure Quality Affordable Housing through the Conservation and Rehabilitation of the Existing Housing Stock**

POLICIES:

- H-2.1** Continue the City’s Housing Rehabilitation Loan Program
- H-2.2** Pursue State and Federal Funds to Support Conservation and Rehabilitation

Goal Area H-3: Housing Affordability

GOALS

- **Increase Homeownership Opportunities for Low and Moderate Income Groups**
- **Provide Financial Assistance as Needed to Extremely Low, Very Low and Low Income Renter Households**
- **Minimize governmental constraints to the development, improvement, and maintenance of housing.**

POLICIES:

- H-3.1** Provide Financial Assistance to Qualifying Homebuyers and Renters

Goal Area H-4: City Coordination

GOALS

- **Coordinate Innovative Housing Efforts with Private and Nonprofit Developers as well as other Jurisdictions and City Departments**
- **Ensure Accountability and Success of the Housing Action Plan**

POLICIES:

- H-4.1** Educate the Public Regarding Affordable Housing Issues and Programs

Goal H-5: Quantified Objectives

Income Category	New Construction	Rehabilitation	Conservation
<i>Extremely Low-Income</i>	459	46	60
<i>Very Low Income</i>	459	46	52
<i>Low Income</i>	574	30	44
<i>Moderate Income</i>	540	28	0
<i>Above Mod. Income</i>	1044	0	0
<i>TOTAL</i>	3076	150	156

Goal Area H-6: Provide Equal Opportunity Housing

GOALS

- **Promote Fair Housing Practices**

POLICIES:

- H-6.1** Use CDBG funds for fair housing enforcement, education, and technical assistance activities.
- H-6.2** Ensure all new multi-family construction meets the accessibility requirements of Federal and State Fair Housing Acts through local permitting and approval processes.
- H-6.3** Increase or maintain resources to establish and support outreach, public education and community development activities through community based or neighborhood organizations.

Chapter 10 -- Noise

Goal Area N-1: Noise

GOALS

- **To Protect City residents from the Harmful and Annoying Effects of Exposure to Excessive Noise.**
- **To Protect the Economic Base of the City by Preventing Incompatible Land Uses from Encroaching upon Existing or Planned Noise-Producing Uses.**
- **To Encourage the Application of State of the Art Land Use Planning Methodologies in Areas of Potential Noise Conflicts.**

POLICIES

- N-1.1** Minimize the impacts of aircraft noise.
- N-1.2** Reduce surface vehicle noise.
- N-1.3** Reduce equipment noise levels.
- N-1.4** Reduce noise levels at the receiver where noise reduction at the source is not possible.
- N-1.5** Coordinate planning efforts so that noise-sensitive land uses are not located near major noise sources.
- N-1.6** Mitigate all significant noise impacts as a condition of project approval for sensitive land uses.

Chapter 11 -- Safety

Goal Area S-1: Disaster Preparedness

GOAL

- **General Disaster Preparedness**

POLICY

S-1.1 Develop and maintain emergency preparedness procedures for the City.

Goal Area S-2: Seismic Safety

GOAL

- **Reasonable Safety for City Residents from the Hazards of Earthquake and Other Geologic Activity**

POLICIES

S-2.1 Reduce the potential danger from earthquake and seismic-related activity from existing buildings where necessary.

S-2.2 Encourage the improvement of all public facilities and infrastructure such as natural gas, fuel, sewer, water, electricity, and railroad lines and equipment with up-to-date seismic safety features.

S-2.3 Restrict urban development in all areas with potential ground failure characteristics.

Goal Area S-3: Flooding

GOAL

- **A City Free From Other Than Street Flooding**

POLICIES

S-3.1 Implement Protective Measures for Areas in the City and the SUDP/SOI, Within the 100-Year and 200-Year Floodplain.

S-3.2 Maintain essential City services in the event of flooding or dam failure.

Goal Area S-4: Fire Protection

GOAL

- **Fire and Hazardous Material Safety for the Residents of the City and For Those Working in Fire Suppression**

POLICIES

S-4.1 Promote the concept of fire protection master planning with fire safety goals, missions, and supporting objectives for the community.

S-4.2 Maintain a reasonable level of accessibility and infrastructure support for fire suppression, disaster, and other emergency services.

Goal Area S-5: Airport Safety

GOAL

- **A Safe Airport Environment Both Above and On the Ground**

POLICIES

- S-5.1** Continue to protect approach areas and control zones for both existing and future runway systems through land use regulations and property acquisition where necessary.
- S-5.2** Prevent the encroachment of potential hazards to flight within the Airport's airspace.

Goal Area S-6: Crime

GOAL

- **Reduced Criminal Activity and An Increased Feeling of Safety and Security in the Community**

POLICIES

- S-6.1** Provide superior community-based police services within the resource constraints of the City.
- S-6.2** Provide services and personnel necessary to maintain community order and public safety.

Goal Area S-7: Hazardous Materials

GOAL

- **Hazardous Materials Safety for City Residents**

POLICIES

- S-7.1** Prevent injuries and environmental contamination due to the uncontrolled release of hazardous materials.
- S-7.2** Ensure that hazardous materials are cleaned up before a property is developed or redeveloped.